



PANHANDLE

BENEWAH, BONNER, BOUNDARY, KOOTENAI, & SHOSHONE COUNTIES

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Unusually warm dry weather, along with a growing economy, pushed down the Panhandle's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate from 6.1 percent in March to 5.8 percent in April. Construction, logging, and the tourism industry all employed more people in April than they normally do because of the unusually mild weather.

Economic growth boosted *Nonfarm Payroll Jobs* 3.2 percent between April 2003 and April 2004. Almost every sector of the region's economy showed growth, including the logging, mining, and manufacturing industries that have struggled since 2001. In April, *Construction* employment rose 7.2 percent above last year's astounding level, as good weather, population growth, large commercial development projects, and low mortgage rates all benefited the construction industry. The closure of the 140-employee Louisiana-Pacific mill in Bonners Ferry and the layoff of 67 employees from Stimson Lumber in Coeur d'Alene decreased *Wood Products Manufacturing* employment 6.0 percent over the 12-month period. Fortunately, a variety of other manufacturing operations added jobs, helping *Manufacturing* grow 0.4 percent. (See Panhandle Table 1 for details.)

Other big winners between April 2003 and April 2004 were *Information*, gaining about 200 jobs from the opening of the Verizon directory assistance center in Coeur d'Alene; *Financial Activities*, benefiting from the growing number of bank branches and the current real estate boom; *Health Care*, growing 6.5 percent from 4,890 jobs to 5,210 jobs; *Leisure & Hospitality*, hosting significantly more tourists, as well as feeding and entertaining more Panhandle residents with rising incomes; *Retail Trade*, growing again after losing 190 jobs between 2000 and 2003; and *Government Administration*, experiencing employment growth mostly because of the 110 jobs added by the Panhandle's five community hospitals. *Professional & Business Services* nearly made up the 600 call center jobs it lost between April 2003 and January 2004, because of the recovery of call centers and growth of employment agencies since February.

Panhandle Table 1: Labor Force & Employment

	April 2004*	Mar 2004	April 2003	% Change From	
				Last Month	Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE					
Seasonally Adjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	94,070	93,660	91,490	0.4	2.8
Unemployed	5,500	5,750	6,920	-4.3	-20.5
% of Labor Force Unemployed	5.8	6.1	7.6		
Total Employment	88,570	87,910	84,570	0.8	4.7
Unadjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	93,470	92,630	91,230	0.9	2.5
Unemployed	6,690	7,970	8,380	-16.1	-20.2
% of Labor Force Unemployed	7.2	8.6	9.2		
Total Employment	86,780	84,660	82,850	2.5	4.7
JOBS BY PLACE OF WORK					
Nonfarm Payroll Jobs** - NAICS	69,610	68,170	67,440	2.1	3.2
Goods-Producing Industries	12,820	12,600	12,380	1.7	3.6
Natural Resources & Mining	1,060	1,280	960	-17.2	10.4
Construction	4,640	4,230	4,330	9.7	7.2
Manufacturing	7,120	7,090	7,090	0.4	0.4
Wood Product Manufacturing	2,670	2,680	2,840	-0.4	-6.0
Other Manufacturing	4,450	4,410	4,250	0.9	4.7
Service-Providing Industries	56,790	55,570	55,060	2.2	3.1
Trade, Transportation, & Utilities	13,590	13,240	13,090	2.6	3.8
Wholesale Trade	1,370	1,320	1,370	3.8	0.0
Retail Trade	10,460	10,130	10,040	3.3	4.2
Utilities	390	390	380	0.0	2.6
Transportation & Warehousing	1,370	1,400	1,300	-2.1	5.4
Information	1,320	1,320	1,100	0.0	20.0
Financial Activities	2,980	2,940	2,810	1.4	6.0
Professional & Business Services	6,350	6,030	6,450	5.3	-1.6
Educational & Health Services	6,980	6,920	6,750	0.9	3.4
Leisure & Hospitality	8,340	7,970	7,980	4.6	4.5
Other Services	2,260	2,210	2,240	2.3	0.9
Government Education	5,340	5,340	5,240	0.0	1.9
Government Administration	8,410	8,400	8,220	0.1	2.3
Government Tribes	1,220	1,200	1,180	1.7	3.4

* Preliminary estimate

**Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month

AREA DEVELOPMENTS

Benewah County

- Plummer in Benewah County is the western trailhead of the 72-mile Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes that officially opened June 5. The eastern trailhead is Mullan. The trail's eastern end opened to walkers and bicyclists in the fall of 2003. The last projects to be completed were reconstruction of the historic Chatcolet railroad swinging bridge on the south end of Lake Coeur d'Alene and construction of the trail through Heyburn State Park to Plummer. Union Pacific (UP) Railroad paid \$8.8 million for the trail's construction to clean up heavy-metal mining wastes spread along railroad tracks that carried materials out of Shoshone County's silver mines from 1886 to 1993. In addition to paying for the trail's construction, which began in 2000, UP established a \$2.6 million fund to maintain the trail. Each of the communities on the spectacularly beautiful trail—Mullan, Wallace, Osburn, Kellogg, Smelterville, Harri-

son, and Plummer—held parties to celebrate the trail’s contributions to their quality of life, as well as the bottom lines of tourist-related businesses.

Although Harrison and Worley are located in Kootenai County, they are closely tied to the St. Maries and Plummer areas, respectively. Information about the Coeur d’Alene tribe’s casino in Worley and new stores in Harrison are included in the Kootenai County section below, but also contribute to rising optimism in Benewah County.

Bonner County

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently gave Unicep Packaging, the Sandpoint manufacturer of one-dose applicators for medications and cosmetics, an \$80,000 research grant to develop wand-like applicators. Unicep will use the grant to design and test a new machine for producing such applicators. Unicep employs about 100 people. The new line will result in more jobs in the future. Two years ago, Unicep employed 35 people.
- Just Burgers—a 50s style drive-in restaurant—opened in early May, just before Sandpoint’s popular Lost in the 50s celebration. Owned by Rob Blair, the drive-in features burgers, homemade onion rings and French fries, and malts and shakes made from hand-scooped ice cream. It is located at 2009 East Superior, inside the Waterfront Texaco at the north end of the Long Bridge.

Boundary County

- Oscar and Shirley Anderson own Idaho Granite Works on Highland Flats near Bonners Ferry. The Andersons and five employees do custom work on granite quarried on the property. They fabricate countertops, signs, pillars, monuments, benches, garden stones, and furniture, which have attracted attention of builders in Idaho and Montana.

Kootenai County

- U.S. Bank announced in May that it plans to build a service center in the Coeur d’Alene area, which will create up to 500 new jobs over the next few years. It expects to break ground this summer on a \$15 million, 60,000-square-foot building in the Mill River development between Seltice Way and the Spokane River near Huetter. When the building is completed in early 2005, it will become U.S. Bank’s second retail payments solution center. The first is in Fargo, North Dakota. A second center is needed because of strong sales growth. The new center will assist small businesses and consumers with credit and debit card accounts. It also will provide customer service for affinity programs, which are partnerships between banks and retailers that lead to customer rewards such as free airline miles with purchases. Hiring for the retail payments solution center will begin in late 2004 or early 2005. U.S. Bank chose Coeur d’Alene among 3,000 communities. Jobs Plus, the nonprofit economic development organization serving Kootenai County, worked hard to convince U.S. Bank that the county was the right choice. Rick Barton, region president of U.S. Bank in North Idaho/Palouse, said, “The pro-business environment in Coeur d’Alene, combined with a skilled and available labor force, access to workforce training, and higher education, and U.S. Bank’s existing presence in the market, were key factors in our decision to build the call center here.”

- The Coeur d’Alene Tribe’s casino, along U.S. Highway 95 near Worley, recently completed a \$15 million expansion and remodel. The first phase, completed in November, doubled the number of guest rooms in the casino’s hotel. With 202 guest rooms, the hotel now can host conventions and conferences. The second phase expanded the gaming area and made several changes for diners. Workers renovated the High Mountain Buffet, adding 100 seats; opened the Sweetgrass Café; built the Nighthawk Lounge; and remodeled the High Mountain Steakhouse, the casino’s fine-dining restaurant. Last August, the casino opened the Circling Raven golf course. *Golf* magazine declared it one of the top 10 new golf courses in 2003. At its summer peak, the casino, including the hotel and golf course, employs 800 people—twice as many as it employed in 2000. In 1993, the casino opened as a bingo hall with fewer than 100 employees. The casino’s growth has changed Worley (pop. 225) from a job-starved area into an area that buses workers in from the Spokane and Coeur d’Alene areas.
- In addition to the casino employment in Kootenai County, the Coeur d’Alene Tribe employs more than 400 people at its headquarters, medical center, farms, retail operations, and schools in Benewah County. The Coeur d’Alene Reservation covers most of western Benewah County and part of southern Kootenai County.
- Two new stores recently opened in Harrison, giving more evidence of its revitalization. Vicki Hedlund recently opened the Crows Feet gift shop, which sells high-end gardening tools, scented candles, gourmet sauces, and other delights. The Crows Feet is located near the Pedal Pusher bicycle shop, which is especially busy because of the nearby Trail of the Coeur d’Alenes. The trail brings many bicyclists to town and has contributed to an increase in local resident bicyclists. On Memorial Day, Ron Wilson opened the Creamery Fudge Factory in downtown Harrison in a building that had been vacant for two decades. The Fudge Factory, which sells local arts and crafts in addition to candy, is near the Landing, the restaurant Wilson opened earlier this year in the shuttered Rose Café. It’s just down the street from the Creamery ice cream shop, also owned by Wilson. More good things are headed Harrison’s way; the town of 270 residents on the shore of Lake Coeur d’Alene will be featured in an upcoming issue of *Sunset* magazine.

Shoshone County

- David and Bonnie DeRoos renovated and opened a bar in downtown Wallace this spring. Connie’s on Cedar features a non-smoking bar, a gallery displaying works by local artists, and a beer garden. The couple also purchased the former Eagles building down the street, opening it as a vintage gaming area, complete with arcade and pinball games.

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